Rock Raiders
9/1/99

The latest revision of Rock Raiders is nearly complete. This revision contains all of the single player missions, vehicles and characters. Two player missions and enemy AI are some of the few items that have yet to be implemented.

Based on the revision of Rock Raiders v.0.1, submitted by Lego Media, the product evaluation group has compiled an evaluation report. Below are the prioritized items of most importance.

The greatest concerns with Rock Raiders are the redundancy of level objectives and the use of the clock in those levels where crystal and Lego Men collection are the primary focus. While it is understood that crystal collection is a central component of the game the manner in which it is presented to the player is not particularly compelling for a number of reasons.

- Due to the imposed time limits the player is afforded little opportunity to explore and is forced into a frantic search for crystals. This provides the player with very little opportunity to improvise or to formulate their own creative plan in which to acquire the crystals. If time is to be utilized as the motivating factor behind the player's action then it is only fair to provide that player with the known location of his or her objectives, otherwise the player is forced to stumble around aimlessly

After speaking with SCEA it is clear that what they are getting at here is that if time is going to be used as a motivating factor it should be utilised in the form of environmental changes over time that force the player to react before an event occurs. Some examples of this are lava that erodes sections of paths, water that begins to flood and rise over the land or landslides that gradually worsen over time. Another possibility that we discussed was the idea that in certain cases, it could be appropriate to place Rock Raider buildings that act as checkpoints for the player. In all cases it was their wish that missions of this nature are more linear in their design as testing has proved that the children simply become lost and disorientated in the existing missions. They would also like to see missions that are not time-based. These can have more complex maps, with hidden areas, etc that encourage exploration with the vehicles. I suggest that in all level designs are drafted and sent to us with accompanying text. We can then go over the missions with SCEA prior to them being implemented in the game.

- The current level design necessitates a trial by error mentality, where the player will lose numerous lives simply attempting to locate the appropriate number of crystals. Once the player has successfully located all crystals the levels become a simple memorized pattern to be performed in a race against the clock.

Some of this relates to what I have written above, but I would add that in general SCEA considered the current levels to be simple placeholders that demonstrate the technology, but in no way reflect final game-play. It is clear that major effort must now go into the final designs of the missions before the title is approved for release. The favored mission level is "Hot Scoop," where the player is involved in problem solving and actually utilises the functions of the vehicles. The approach that should be used is to create a level script first. This should define what the player's objectives are; what the secondary objectives/bonus objectives are; what the general style of gameplay is (e.g. race against time, exploration and discovery, combat); and then go on to define particular puzzles, challenges etc. Each level should have one or more clearly defined crux points. These are the sections of the level that present the player with the most significant challenge. As far as possible these are the points of the level that should stretch the player and require them to develop new skills or really master those they have already acquired. The player should of course be well rewarded after these points. At the end of the day I should be able to point to a section of a level map and ask the designer "what is happening here? What is the purpose of this section?" and he or she should be able to give me a concise and coherent answer. There should be no dead space that is just there for the sake of having more map. Every part of the level should be honed to provide the player with a carefully crafted experience.

- The "Silver" and "Gold" mission objectives seem completely artificial and do not necessarily reward the player for being a better or more creative player. Essentially "Silver" and "Gold" awards are simply objects to be located and inundated into the memorized retrieval process, in addition to standard mission objectives.

We should consider parameters beyond time / number of crystals. For example we could include a vehicle usage factor, a damage taken factor and a creatures "herded" factor (see below).

The following are some suggestions that could greatly improve upon the current level designs.

- Sections of the HUD display are currently cut-off by the edges of the screen. In addition, providing the player with a ratio of the number of items collected instead of a simple whole number would aid the player in accomplishing the mission goals. A player may not always remember the mission objectives once engrossed in level.

SCEA agreed that adding a large number of characters (10/10) was not a good idea but suggested a pull-up display could be activated during a mission that contained the a summary of the vital mission information.

- The further incorporation of "Classic Platform" elements in the crystal collection process is highly recommended. There are many platform elements currently in the game, but they could be expanded upon further. Sections requiring a successive series of well timed jumps, negotiation of moving platforms, and timing sequences in order to avoid steaming vents, could all be utilized to make the title a more enjoyable experience.

We discussed various directions to take in relation to this comment. It is clear from the discussions that SCEA are keen to see much more environmental interaction. Examples of this are "islands" of solidified magma that float back and forth in a lava river, forcing the player to make a timed jump. Landslides that occur at regular intervals, enemies that "patrol" a defined path rather than following the player, pathways that erode once they have been traversed etc.

- The "Hot Scoop!" level is one of the more compelling levels in the game and more levels should try to incorporate this style of puzzle resolution. The vehicles should be the primary focus of the title, and it should be with their use and their ability to manipulate the environment that puzzles are resolved. Too frequently throughout the title the vehicle is no more then an alternate means in which to travel from point A to point B, or simply another means with wich to drill rock.

Generally it is felt that there is not a big enough emphasis on utilising the functions on the vehicles. This should be addressed in the new mission designs. This was the whole idea of having an action game in the first place: to make the player use multiple vehicles to achieve the level objectives. At present there is far too much emphasis on the player on foot.

- An example of a more compelling level would be one where the player must first use the Rock Loader to herd enemies into natural pens before any drilling or crystal collecting can occur. The player might have to identify areas large enough for the enemies to be herded into, or the enemies may need to be relocated several times in a level before all level objectives can be met.

- In previous versions there was an additional camera that brought the player closer to the character. Due to technical restraints the developer has noted that the camera cannot be placed too closely. This is unfortunate because the detail of the models is quite good and the game could greatly benefit from additional camera positions, such as an over the shoulder view. Effort should be made to provide a camera view as close to the character as the technology will allow.

SCEA have suggested that a camera could encircle the player at the start of a new mission, panning back once the player starts to move. This would at least show off the detail of the character at the start and help to differentiate the Player Characters from one another. When new vehicles are discovered, a similar camera pan could be utilised, enabling the player to view the vehicle models (which they praised highly) as soon as the player presses the button to climb into the vehicle the camera would pan back and adopt the standard playing perspective.

- Enemy behavior at this time is still being optimized. Currently enemies are extremely frustrating due to their speed and persistency. An enfeebled enemy will often times recover and attack the player's character when the player is focused on some other activity, such as drilling. Enemies that behave with purpose such as patrolling areas, protecting young, or actively pursuing food are more interesting then enemies that are simply triggered by the players presence.

Essentially this point has been covered by ideas already discussed above. However the main point is that the creatures need to be less of a haphazard irritation and more of a considered threat. This can be achieved by clever zoning of creatures and by timing the movement to be faster or slower than the Player Character. Currently the player gathers a "conga line" of creatures behind him that cannot be out run, but do not present a considered challenge – they are just annoying.

> **Comment [LS1]:** See my note 2. The same thing applies here. When creatures are added to a level the designer should be asking: "what is the player attempting to do at this point?" "how does this particular creature affect the player's ability to achieve that objective?" "is this the right creature for this point in the level?" "does the creature here add genuine challenge or is it just annoying?" Creatures should never just be liberally sprinkled across a level without thought. Again - pretty basic stuff.

- Currently players must wait for the jump mechanic to recharge. It appears that this is intentional to create greater challenge for the player, however it is only frustrating and unnecessary. This title contains some platform elements and it is highly encouraged that more platform elements be incorporated where the focus can be placed on the jumping action rather than the management of the jumping resource.

SCEA were encouraged when we explained the change that had been made to this feature.

- Currently the player's character is required to exit vehicles in order to collect items and to identify drillable rock formations. Players should be able to perform both these actions from the safety of the vehicle.

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- When attempting to rescue fellow Rock Raiders the collision detection of the jumping Lego men is poor, requiring the player to pass through them several times before a successful retrieval can be made. Touching the Rock Raiders should transport them to the ship immediately.

I imagine that this is a relatively simple game play tweak.

- When utilizing Analog Control quick direction changes of the character can cause unpleasant camera movement resulting in choppy transitions. In most instances the camera does not need to be repositioned this dramatically.

SCEA feel that although the control methods and the camera are quite good, improvements could be made.

- Currently there is very little to distinguish the Lego men from one another in their physical appearance. In the menu screen all Lego Men have distinct helmets. In the game all Lego men lack headgear of any sort.

I believe this has already been implemented, however it hasn't it should be addressed.

- The appropriate voices should be implemented for the movie cut scenes. Currently the characters only grunt and grumble.

This is something that we could consider doing for the US PSX version only (since localised versions are not required on the CD).

SCEA Third Party Product Evaluation Group